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## Sens. George and Birkholz: "Now is the time to act"

**LANSING** - Sens. Tom George and Patty Birkholz are urging the governor to support the removal of three dams on the Kalamazoo River and not veto the funding allocated for the project in next year's state budget.

"Now is the time to act before these dams fall apart," said George, R-Texas Township. "We've been waiting for years and it is time the governor show some support for this local project. We need to clean up the river and return it to its natural state as soon as possible."

The Legislature has appropriated \$2 million from the Clean Michigan Initiative Clean Water Fund in the Department of Natural Resources budget for the removal of the Otsego, Plainwell and Trowbridge dams on the Kalamazoo River including preparation activities. If the allocation is not used, the money will be returned to the Clean Water Fund.

"Cleaning up the Kalamazoo River has been top priority for area residents for many years and it's time we begin the process by using money in the Clean Water Fund to get things rolling," said Birkholz, R-Saugatuck Township. "This funding is appropriate because removing these dams will affect water quality and the surrounding natural vegetation and wildlife. We must act now in order to preserve and protect the river."

Negotiations between local, federal and state officials to remove these dams have been ongoing for more than 20 years. Cleanup costs have been estimated at more than \$1 billion. The federal government retains the authority over the clean-up though the state owns the dams and is responsible for their condition.

"Michigan United Conservation Clubs supports the removal of dams when they are no longer serving the purpose for which they were intended," said Sam Washington, executive director of MUCC. "The dams on the Kalamazoo River clearly fit into this category and pose a severe threat to the environment because of their deteriorated condition. The situation is becoming more dangerous by the day. We need action, not more talk. This appropriation will help us move in the right direction."

The DNR budget was passed today by the Senate and House and is on its way to the governor for her approval. The budget takes effect Oct. 1.